Information and Communications

Search Engines in Mexico:

Increasing your Internet Visiblilty

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Summary

The focus of this study is to increase the visibility of U.S. exporters among Mexican Internet users. This report includes Internet market-specific advertising procedures for the major search engines visited in Mexico. Also, it presents general business practices based on SEO (search engine optimization) principles applicable to any international market.

Search Engine Advertising in Mexico

American exporters to Mexico enter a country with a small, but rapidly growing, Internet market. The latest figures estimate that over 17 million Mexicans have access to the Internet, which represents an increase of 7 million from the year 2002. Over 70% of the current Internet users are between the ages of 13-34, which means that the number of Internet users should continue to expand in the upcoming years. American companies should also be encouraged by the rapid growth in electronic commerce (E-commerce), which saw an increase of over 80% from 2004 to 2005.

U.S. firms looking to increase the exposure of their websites in Mexico should consider advertising through search engines popular in Mexico. Currently 84% of all Mexicans who access the web use a search engine, second in popularity only to e-mail. A cost-effective method for American companies to take advantage of this trend is to advertise through the search engines' "Sponsored Sites" section. This lists a company's website at the top of any list of relevant search results. Currently the Mexican market is evenly divided between the advertising services offered by Yahoo!'s TeRespondo and Google's AdWord. Below is a brief description on the current services:

1. Google México

- Advertising Programs:
  Google Mexico runs AdWord a service similar to TeRespondo that lists Sponsored links at the right side of the results page, and sometimes, depending on the relavance of that particular link even over natural search results, appears on the top of the list.
  Sponsored links are also listed on Terra.com, Ask.com, and Clarin.com among others.
- Subscription Process:
  To register, a company selects its target language, enters its relevant contact and webpage information, chooses the key words responding to relevant search results, and selects the currency and the Cost Per Click (CPC) price. Companies can choose to receive a monthly bill or open a pre-paid account.
- Important Features:
  AdWord offers both a support page with general help topics and an e-mail address for more specific concerns. Web link listing is not only based on CPC, but also on the amount of traffic the link receives.

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- Cost Calculation:
  Google AdWord allows the company to set the price of the CPC, and the daily and monthly amounts the company wishes to spend on the link. Unlike Yahoo's TeRespondo, there is no minimum amount, but a higher CPC will result in a higher listing.
- Important Data:
  Google was launched in 1998. Currently 14.3 Million Mexicans (80% of the market) visit Google monthly, with 13.1 million using the search engine (Source: ComScore-mediametrix).

2. Yahoo! México

- Advertising Programs:
  Yahoo! Mexico runs TeRespondo, a service that lists a company's web page at the top of relevant search results in the "Resultados Partrocinados" or sponsored links section. TeRespondo also lists the company's web link on T1 MSN, EsMás.com, SecciónAmarilla.com, VeanMe.com, and Monograficos.com.
- Subscription Process:
  To register, a company enters its relevant contact and web page information, chooses the key words responding to relevant search results, and then opens an account with TeRespondo and deposits a minimum of $500 MXP through a personal check, bank account, or credit card.
- Important Features:
  TeRespondo offers a monthly report that summarizes the Internet traffic that the company's link has received. TeRespondo offers a help page and e-mail address for support issues and concerns.
- Cost Calculation:
  TeRespondo charges its clients each time their link is accessed, taking the money from a pre-paid account opened upon registration. The CPC starts at a minimum of $.10 MXP, with a higher web site listing allotted to the most expensive CPC. TeRespondo clients deposit in their accounts as needed, depending on their CPC and the Internet traffic their link receives.
- Important Data:
  Yahoo! Mexico was launched by Yahoo in 1999. Currently 13.4 million Mexicans (74% of the market) access Yahoo! each month, with 7.5 million using the Yahoo! México search engine (Source: ComScore-mediametrix).

3. MSN/Prodigy

- Advertising Programs:
  Uses Yahoo's TeRespondo

- Important Data:
  16.2 million Mexicans (94% of the market) visit an MSN site each month, with 7.8 million using the MSN/Prodigy search engine. (Source: ComScore-mediametrix).

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4. Terra Networks

- Advertising Programs:
  Uses Google's AdWord.
- Important Data:
  Terra.com was founded in 2000 and receives 9 million unique visitors (Source: Terra Networks).

Optimizing Company Web Sites to Target Mexican Buyers

Search engine optimization (SEO) focuses on creating web pages that are easy for potential customers to find through search engines. The key to SEO is good page structure and organization of content that the audience will understand. Therefore, a company must balance usability (the quality of a user's experience when they interact with a website), professional appearance, business goals, and search engine marketing to create a site that is easy for potential customers to find and use.

The first challenge faced by American companies exporting to Mexico is the language barrier. To take advantage of the Mexican market, it is essential to offer a web site in Spanish. American exporters' first obstacle is that their Spanish web site may not be comprehensible if it is translated word-for-word from the English site. An added difficulty is working with a new potential customer base, with its unique cultural and local factors.

When creating the Spanish version of a web site, it is very important to define your audience as a first step. Once you identify your audience, you will want to consider the many local factors that could affect your desired outcome: to reach Mexican potential buyers.

1. **Localization.**
Customizing your web site for the Mexican market will make your product look less foreign and more attractive. Mexican customers form their opinions of American companies based on their websites, so positive first impressions are crucial. Some ideas are:
- show photos of how the product is used in Mexico
- use packaging with all information written in Spanish
- find a distributor or representative to take care of your local customer service
- set up a local telephone number in Mexico

If you already have an exclusive Mexican distributor, let him "copy" your company web site—that means to replicate the look and feel, and translate it into Spanish. This translation must take a culturally-competent approach—this ensures that language and cultural issues are appropriate to the new target audience. By adapting the content of the existing English-language web site to address the cultural mores of the Mexican audience, you will be taking the proper steps to ensure the successful branding of your product in the new market.

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2. Language Use.

When designing your text areas, bear in mind that Spanish translates into longer sentences. Contract professional help when translating your web content and always avoid automatic translators. Writing style is important and Mexicans appreciate good composition skills and localized language. To appeal to Mexicans, the text should be written with the Spanish terminology used in Mexico. Also, missing Spanish accents are considered grammatical mistakes. It is crucial to avoid slang (unless it is meaningful for your target audience), and to be careful with jokes that might not be acceptable to the Mexican sense of humor. Humor is difficult to translate; be sure to get advice on the proper way to adapt jokes to avoid offending your potential customers.

3. Keep Updated and Quality Content.

Updated, quality content will increase the likelihood of American companies' web sites being found by Mexican buyers. Therefore, relevant and in-depth content, and easy-to-use navigation are essential. Online text should be clear and concise, and should offer answers to potential questions about your products and services. Keep your customers interested by providing fresh content. Offering reference material for your industry is an easy way to attract visitors and increase traffic to your site.

4. Carefully Research and Select Spanish Keywords.

Your goal is to be among the top search results for the relevant keywords in Spanish. Spanish keywords and phrases need to be carefully researched and chosen because they are colloquial and language-specific, and may not translate directly from English. Competition among companies is high to identify their products with specific keyword searches. If your company is identified with the relevant keywords, the traffic volume to your site will increase. Search engines companies have made strong efforts to build search engines that serve the Spanish-language market (such as espanol.yahoo.com). Search engine industry professionals predict that in a near future geographic locations and link analysis will be used to determine the right pages relevant to the Spanish words. Also, ensure that your keywords are coded as metadata into each one of your web pages.

5. Importance of Links.

The popularity of your webpage is based on the number of pages on the web that link to your webpage. The more links that go back and forth between your web pages, the more the search engines will find them. Linking to local chambers and associations, user groups, web industry forums and other industry websites helps to increase visibility and rankings of the sites you link to. However, keep in mind that quality is more important than quantity. External links should be reviewed regularly to make sure they still work and that they are still relevant. Links should fulfill your clients´ expectations to lead them to additional information related to a particular topic.

6. Selling over the Internet to Mexican users.

If you are thinking to sell online, make sure to have reliable encryption and safety procedures. Since credit card fraud is higher elsewhere than in the USA, the easiest way is to offer the products and services on your Spanish site and link to your U.S. site for credit card processing. To learn more about doing business in Mexico using eCommerce, please read the US Commercial Service market research report titled "Electronic Commerce in Mexico" published on September 15, 2005 by Juan Carlos Prieto. The Mexican Association of Internet (http://amipci.org.mx/) conducts annualy a survey to Internet users in Mexico and publishes (available only in Spanish) the outcome on their website.

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7. Domain Names.

NIC-Mexico (Network Information Center) is the official organization for national domain registration in Mexico, recognized by the ICANN (Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers), and the IANA (Internet Assigned Numbers Authority). Domains under the classification ".com.mx" can have their server and ISP anywhere in the world. All other classifications (.org.mx, net.mx, and gob.mx) may have their ISP overseas but the organization or institution must have a local office in Mexico. Contrary to most international registration organizations, NIC-Mexico requests that the applicant has the hosting server already configured. The registration fee is U.S.$35 per year and it is important to have the name and the technical identification for your server before contacting NIC-Mexico for registration. If you want to make your application in English, check for NIC-Mexico representatives in the US since the online registration process is only offered in Spanish: http://www.nic.mx

Limitations and Recommendations

U.S. Government best practices on Web Content Management (www.webcontent.gov) state that websites must provide easy access, be written in plain language, have consistent navigation, have a search engine, use standard metadata, provide access to documents in appropriate file formats and provide appropriate access to data. Organizations must inform audiences of website major re-design changes.

Here are some recommendations that can be applied not only to the Spanish version of your website but to any international and domestic website.

1. Analyzing internal search data.

Find out the terms your visitors are typing into your internal search engine. Make sure the terms they use are the same terms and labels you use on your site. The most requested items should easily be accessible you're your homepage. Understanding how users search, what keywords and engines they use, and how they respond to content within the context of their search is important to the success of your site. By looking at how users find your site, you can learn so much more about customer intent and perspective than you can by looking at a user's path out of context.

2. Improve your audience experience.

U.S. government research shows that people cannot find the information they seek on web sites about 60% of the time. Conducting usability testing and customer satisfaction reviews allow you to get evidence-based data that identifies what you need to improve on your site. This effort will result on satisfied clients that find what they're looking for. E-mails, phone calls, letters, operator reports, and other contacts with the public could be used, as well for this purpose. Website design and content writing should be based on ever-changing audiences' needs; for this reason, testing and analysis should be an ongoing effort.

3. Measure your success.

An effective website strikes a balance between user and business goals. Like any other marketing effort, itt is necessary to test, analyse statistics, and conduct customer service surveys and usability studies to measure results and make adjustments, especially when doing advertising search engine campaigns. A website should do both satisfy user needs and make money.

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4. Web-related decision making.

A working group should be formed to support web content managers' decision making (a web content manager is one who writes, edits, manages, and forms strategic plans for the content of websites). The group should focus on researching and formulating recommendations for new content or changes on information, and identifying resources and opportunities to make your website more client-focus and navigation-friendly. Raising the quality and effectiveness of your website is a permanent process that should involve all members of your organization.

5. Hiring outsourcing services.

It might be the best for your company to hire an outsourcing advisory service that has expertise in specific areas, including usability, information architecture, library science, depository libraries, records management, e-Marketing strategies, program management, web analytics, and the like.

For More information

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